DRILL BIT

MAHTAB SAFDARI

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Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events, is purely ~~coincidental~~ intentional.

To ... no one in particular

This is the story of two people who, for years, were separated by nothing more than a single wall—but had never seen each other, never even known the other existed. Until one day... fate plunged its arm deep into the game and brought them into each other's lives.

That day, Malan was angry—just as he was during most days and hours of his life. Very angry. He was upset with himself, and with everyone he knew—and everyone he didn't. A young man in the late third decade of his life—or to be precise, twenty-seven years old. He wasn't handsome, but he wasn't ugly either. If it weren't for all the rage on his face, he might even have been charming. Maybe even stolen a few hearts, as they say.

That day, he had a major argument at the university—with several people, both academic elites and non-elites. From the professor who had given him an anxiety-inducing D, to the esteemed dean, the head of the academic department, and even the low-level staff who had blocked his registration

for the next semester. Although those two staff members were the least to blame, Malan treated them with the most aggression.

Malan, who had failed at least four of his courses with grades in the D or F range, was—according to the latest update from the electronic registration system—not allowed to select courses for the upcoming semester. Although the system was computerized and registration was supposed to be done online, Malan and all the other students still had to physically enter the "online registration room," where an elderly lady was in charge. They had to give her their personal information so she could register them for the next semester—electronically and fully online.

The incident that triggered Malan's anger that day happened after his meeting with that very elderly lady. According to the documented and up-to-date information from the electronic registration system, Malan learned not only that he was barred from registering for the next semester, but also that he had to immediately go to the Supplemental Affairs Building to settle his account, return his student ID card, fill out forms 17-3 and 12-4, submit photocopies of his transcripts from previous semesters, and sign forms 12-5 and 19-6—personally, along with one of his specialized course instructors and, of course, the head of the academic department.

All of this, of course, was simpler than it sounded.

If any of this doesn't make sense to the dim-witted reader whose IQ is just slightly higher than the author's, let me put it plainly: Malan had been expelled from the university—or more accurately, was on the verge of being expelled. At this university, every student's journey ended with either a gold-embossed or silver-embossed certificate. While it might seem that the average person would prefer the gold one, educated and informed students knew that true success lay in earning the silver-embossed certificate, which signified the successful completion of their studies and served as their official diploma.

The gold-embossed paper, however, was the mark of expulsion—the very one Malan was about to receive. Though not before the head of the academic department signed forms 12-5 and 19-6 for him.

Now, why gold was chosen to represent expulsion and silver to signify successful graduation might be a question that arises for the kind of reader who loses focus at the slightest detail and can't follow the main thread of the story. This choice of gold and silver goes back to whoever made it—and their refined sensibility in selecting such a subtle distinction. The reason behind it could be the subject of another story, but certainly not this one.

That day, Malan entered the head of the department's office four times, the dean's office twice—each time after arguing with the secretary—and at least fifteen times into the

elderly lady's registration room. He spoke to all of them in a tone and language the author is too ashamed to repeat. Only compassionate and patient individuals like the esteemed dean, the department head, and of course the elderly lady could endure the flood of vulgar language with such grace and tolerance.

Malan tried to justify his low grades in the clumsiest way possible, saying things like, "I have to work day and night to make ends meet, so I didn't have time to study," hoping to convince them—and ultimately persuade the updated online registration system—to reverse its decision. But the wise dean and the not-so-wise elderly lady, both seasoned by years of experience, weren't fooled by Malan's hollow excuses.

At the very least, if Malan had provided some evidence and attached it to his file, things might have turned out a little differently.

For instance, if Malan had truly been telling the truth and had been working instead of pursuing the sacred duty of studying, then surely, he must have earned some form of income—something he could have presented, or at least partially attached to his file, to persuade the updated registration system to reconsider its decision with the help of the department head. But since Malan failed to provide any evidence, the wise and reasonable dean ruled that he should be escorted out of the university by a few burly members of the student security team.

On his way home, Malan mysteriously ended up with bruises, pain, and a bit of bleeding from the corner of his lip and nose—likely caused either by emotional distress or air pollution.

Before heading home, he stopped by the student dormitory, stuffed a few pieces of clothing along with his notes and books into a small duffel bag, and walked through the green dormitory grounds one last time before leaving for good. A few boys his age waved at him with crooked smiles that looked more like smirks—and one of them even envied him.

If you imagine that Malan had now become homeless and was wandering the streets, you'd be sorely mistaken. Throughout his entire time as a student, he had rarely lived in the dormitory. In fact, he resided at the home of Mr. Cholak—a very, very distant relative of his father. So distant, in fact, that even Malan himself could never recall the exact relationship without getting confused.

Mr. Cholak, who lived abroad, owned a home in the city where Malan was studying—specifically, an apartment in a high-rise overlooking the skyline. During one of his trips back to his homeland, while visiting the modest town where he'd grown up, he happened to run into Malan's father. Upon learning that Malan lived in the same city where he owned property, Mr. Cholak asked Malan's father if his son

could occasionally check on the apartment to make sure everything was in order.

And so, the key to the apartment ended up in Malan's hands. Malan, who couldn't even dream of renting such a place in this sprawling metropolis, happily accepted the responsibility of looking after it.

But contrary to the original agreement, Malan not only kept an eye on the apartment—he also lived there, without paying Mr. Cholak a single cent. The only times he had to vacate were when Mr. Cholak's immediate relatives came to the metropolis for a visit. Then, Malan would hand over the key and spend a few days at the dormitory.

Finally, Malan arrived home. He was exhausted, hungry, and angry—all of which were entirely his own fault. If he hadn't walked the long route from the university to the dormitory and then from the dormitory to the apartment, he wouldn't have been so tired or so hungry.

And the anger? Well, that was a whole other story. Malan had never learned how not to be irrationally angry. Honestly, someone so thin-skinned probably deserves whatever happens to him...

Deserves it? Maybe that's a hasty judgment from this clueless narrator.

Malan headed to the fridge. You're probably thinking it was empty and he wouldn't find anything to eat. You'd be completely wrong. Mr. Cholak's sister had been staying in

the apartment just two or three days earlier. Yes, she had come to the metropolis for a visit from their hometown. As it happened, she was quite wealthy, and naturally, she had stocked the fridge with delicious food—not so much that it would be unreasonable for a ten-day trip, but still, it was more than generous. There were half-eaten meals in takeout containers, some fruit, dairy products, and other items that hadn't had time to expire.

Malan took out two of the takeout containers to heat them up. But then he seemed to change his mind. His nose, by chance, came close to the space between his arm and torso, and the dizzying aroma that greeted him made him reconsider.

He stepped into the bathroom, picked up the empty shampoo bottle, and went back to the kitchen. He took a new bottle from the cabinet and returned to the bathroom. He placed the new shampoo bottle on the plastic shelf hanging from the wall. The shelf immediately came loose and collapsed onto the floor.

He had been meaning to fix that shelf for a long time—it was hanging by a single loose screw and was bound to fall sooner or later. And finally, it happened. On this very day, at this very hour, when Malan was furious with everything. He lost his temper. He kicked the shelf, sending the soap and comb flying against the bathroom walls.

He could hear water running—from the wall behind the bathroom. Probably someone in the neighboring apartment was taking a shower. Malan stood silently for a few moments, listening. Then he went and brought the drill, finally starting the task he should've done long ago.

He rummaged through the toolbox, looking for a suitable screw, but couldn't find one. Eventually, he settled for a very long screw that seemed more appropriate than the rest. He picked up the drill and began boring into the wall. The bit entered with minimal effort, and a fine white powder spilled from the hole onto the floor.

The drill was making progress, cutting through the wall—until suddenly, it got stuck. The more Malan tried to force it, the less success he had. He pushed harder, but still couldn't get it to go any further. He shoved the drill back and forth several times, but it felt as if the drill itself had fused with the wall.

He turned off the drill and tried to pull it out—when suddenly, a loud scream rang out.

He let go of the drill, but it remained stuck in place, protruding perpendicularly from the wall. The shouting continued. Malan pressed his ear against the wall. A man on the other side was yelling. His words weren't clear, but he was saying something very loudly.

Then came a few knocks against the wall.

Throughout all this, Malan kept his ear pressed to the wall, listening to what was happening behind it. When he heard the banging, he instinctively responded by pounding his fist against the wall a few times.

The sound of water from the other side stopped. The man's voice became slightly clearer. He was shouting—calling for help. Malan began speaking to him.

The man shouted fragments, but Malan could only make out a few words: "drill," "ear," and... Then suddenly, he was struck by fear. It was as if a horrifying thought had crossed his mind.

He asked the man if he was alone. The man replied yes.

Even the shortest answers had to be repeated several times before they could be heard clearly through the wall.

Eventually, through the man's words, Malan understood that he lived in the adjacent block, in unit 7. The man asked Malan to come and help him. He told Malan there was a key hidden under the flowerpot in front of his apartment, and Malan could use it to enter.

Malan quickly left the apartment, went down to the ground floor, and entered the elevator in the left hallway—the one he had never used before, since it belonged to the neighboring block. The right-side block, where Mr. Cholak's apartment was located, contained units one through five on each floor, while the other block housed units six through ten.

He pressed the button for the twelfth floor. Since it was clearly the same floor as Mr. Cholak's apartment. Malan stepped out of the elevator and found the key exactly where the man had said—under the flowerpot in front of the door. He unlocked the apartment and went inside.

The apartment was much larger and far more luxurious than Mr. Cholak's. Malan looked around. All the doors were closed. He ignored the larger ones, assuming they led to bedrooms, and opened a small door at the end of the living room—but it was a guest restroom. He spotted another small door in the entry hallway, but that too turned out to be a restroom.

He figured the bathroom must be inside one of the bedrooms. The first bedroom had no bathroom. Neither did the second. The third had a bathroom—but it was empty. The fourth also had no bathroom. And finally, even without guessing, it was obvious that everything was in the fifth room.

He opened the door. It was a very large room, with a small door at the far end. He opened it, and from the steamy air inside, he realized he had found the place he was looking for. As the door opened, the voice of the man he had previously heard through the wall of Cholak's bathroom reached his ears.

As the steam began to clear, Malan could make out the man's face. But since the man was naked, Malan felt embarrassed to look directly at him. The man's first request

was for a towel. Malan picked one up from behind the bathroom door and handed it to him. The man wrapped it around himself.

Now Malan could see his face more comfortably—though only in profile. He stood sideways, next to the wall, completely still. Malan watched him in silence, waiting for him to turn and face him. But the man didn't move at all.

Malan said nothing and simply stood there. Eventually, the man asked for his name. Malan told him. Then the man asked him to come stand directly in front of him. Malan did as he was told.

It was only when he stepped closer that he realized why the man hadn't moved at all. Yes—his terrifying suspicion was correct. The drill bit had pierced the man's ear.

Malan was horrified by the sight and asked how he was feeling. But the man said he felt perfectly fine, and even the headache that had led him to take a hot shower had suddenly vanished.

Malan tried to examine the man's ear, which was firmly stuck to the wall, and was surprised there was no blood. He stepped back a little and observed the scene from a few paces away.

Finally, he said what he should have said from the very beginning—a simple apology.

The man immediately laughed and said there was no need to apologize, because clearly Malan wasn't at fault for what had happened.

Suddenly, the man's face turned red, his mouth opened, and after a few seconds, a sound emerged. Malan, stunned, realized the man was laughing—actually bursting into laughter.

It was strange that his face turned red before any sound came out, but Malan was certain that whatever the man was doing, no matter how odd it looked, it could only be laughter. Malan was puzzled. If this had happened to him, he would've been furious. And if the person responsible for the incident stood in front of him and stared, he wouldn't just laugh—he would definitely try to attack them.

The man couldn't help himself. His face grew redder and redder, and eventually, because he was laughing so hard, the towel slipped and fell to the floor. Malan quickly picked it up and wrapped it around him again. He stood there, waiting for the laughter to subside. Gradually, the steam in the bathroom cleared, and everything became more visible. When the man finally stopped laughing—Malan recognized him.

There was no doubt in Malan's mind—it was him. And if it wasn't, it had to be his twin brother or doppelgänger. Without thinking, Malan blurted out, "You're that bastard..." The man interrupted, "If by 'that bastard' you

mean the Head of National Media Advertising, then yes—you guessed right."

Only then did Malan realize he'd used a disrespectful phrase. He tried to smooth things over, but the man—who didn't seem offended at all—told him there was no need. Yes, he was none other than Mr. Sharyad, the Head of National Media Advertising. Although the title didn't clearly convey the scope of his responsibilities, Malan knew very well that every piece of content in the country—whether news, visual or non-visual programs, written or audio materials, or anything publishable—was subject to Mr. Sharyad's special oversight, along with that of his anonymous staff, before it could be released.

He was considered one of the most influential and powerful men in the country—so much so that countless stories had been spun about the extent of his power. Stories about how he had brought the previous head of state to power, and how he had personally orchestrated that leader's resignation. Or how some big-shot had risen to wealth and prominence thanks to his favor. Or how someone had landed a prestigious government position—someone who, even in their wildest dreams, couldn't have imagined being anything more than a second-grade teacher.

And then there was the list of once-important people who, after falling out with Sharyad, had ended up farming in some remote patch of desert—grateful simply to be alive. In short,

he was one of those heavyweights you didn't mess with lightly. All of this flashed through Malan's mind in a fraction of a second, and suddenly, fear gripped him. He thought what he'd done would surely have consequences.

Sharyad, as if he had read Malan's mind, suddenly said, "Look, son, I already told you—you're not to blame for any of this. There's just one thing left." Malan swallowed hard and waited to hear what it was.

Sharyad continued: in two hours, he had an important meeting with the Head of Non-Private Organizations from the neighboring northern country, to finalize a very significant agreement—one that would clearly benefit only one side. The arrangement, however, had been carefully crafted to make the northern official believe it was mutually beneficial.

He said this, turned red, laughed—and after a moment, the sound of his laughter finally emerged. A bit later, he returned to normal and explained that he absolutely didn't want to miss the meeting. But given the current situation, he couldn't attend himself. Malan would have to help him.

Malan was willing to help to make up for what he'd done, but he didn't know how. Sharyad gave Malan a phone number and asked him to relay his words—word for word—to the secretary and advisor of the head of non-private organizations from the neighboring northern country. His long-winded instructions, which seemed rather incoherent

on the surface, likely meant (at least in Malan's interpretation) that the in-person meeting should be canceled and replaced with an online video conference in two hours.

Malan left the bathroom and followed Sharyad's instructions precisely. Then he returned and told Sharyad that everything had been arranged just as he wanted, and that he'd be able to negotiate via video conference in two hours.

Sharyad told him they didn't have much time and needed to get started immediately to avoid falling behind schedule. First, he asked Malan to bring him a suit and help him put it on.

Then Sharyad asked him to fetch a picture frame and a table from one of the rooms, and a striped curtain from the closet in another. He wanted all of it brought into the bathroom.

Malan did exactly as instructed. He hung the striped curtain on the wall behind Sharyad, placed the table in front of him, arranged the framed photos Sharyad had requested on the table, and then brought the computer and other necessary equipment, setting them up on the large table he had positioned earlier.

Fortunately, despite its small door, the bathroom was quite spacious—so much so that if Sharyad had asked, Malan could have easily fit a double bed inside.

Sharyad examined the image that people from the northern neighboring country would see on their monitor and made a few minor adjustments. Everything was now ready for the negotiation.

Then, suddenly, he called Malan and asked him to stand in front of him so he could see him—since he couldn't turn his head to look.

Malan stepped forward and stood before him.

Sharyad stared at him for a few moments. He didn't say a word—just stared.

After a few moments, he asked Malan to leave. As Malan was about to exit the bathroom, a thought struck him. He turned back and asked Sharyad if he needed to notify anyone to come over.

Sharyad said no—he didn't need anyone.

Malan asked if he didn't even want to inform someone about his current condition.

Sharyad firmly replied that for now, there was no need.

Malan didn't hide his surprise. He told Sharyad he'd always assumed such negotiations involved teams of people on both sides—not just one person. That struck him as odd.

Sharyad agreed, but added that while that might be true for others, he had never brought anyone with him to a negotiation. He simply didn't trust other people—or the way they handled things. That's why he always conducted

important negotiations alone. And the leaders of other countries were well aware of this. It never surprised them.

Malan nodded and left the bathroom.

He hadn't yet left the fifth room—the one with the bathroom—when Sharyad called out to him again.

Malan returned, and Sharyad asked him not to leave the apartment just yet, saying he might still need his help. Malan agreed and promised to stay for the time being.

Sharyad told him he could relax and rest anywhere in the apartment—but that he should be ready to return to the bathroom immediately if needed.

Malan left the bathroom and headed straight to the kitchen. He prepared himself a meal and began eating in a strange calm. He looked around. Everything was arranged with astonishing lack of taste—yet at first glance, it was clear that enormous amounts of money had been spent, even on the smallest household items.

Then suddenly, he saw everything differently. Banknotes were hanging everywhere. It was as if the sofas, carpets, tables, and chairs were covered in money, bills sprouting from picture frames—even the walls and table lamps.

Malan blinked rapidly several times until everything returned to normal.

Just then, a sound came from the bathroom.

Malan quickly made his way to the fifth room, but realized Sharyad hadn't called him—in fact, he had already begun his

negotiations with the northern neighboring country. Malan was about to leave, but curiosity got the better of him; he wanted to know what Sharyad was saying.

To his surprise, he discovered that Sharyad was speaking in the language of that neighboring country.

Malan, who of course couldn't understand a single word, returned to the living room, lay down on the couch, and drifted off to sleep.

In his dream, he saw many people gathered around him, staring with smiles on their faces. But even in the dream, he couldn't tell whether they were smiling in mockery or admiration.

He woke with a start. Got up and went to the fifth room. There was no sound coming from the bathroom. He approached the door quietly. Just as he reached it, Sharyad called out, asking him to come in and stand in front of him. Malan did as he was told.

Sharyad told him he'd finished a while ago but hadn't wanted to wake him. Malan looked at him in surprise, and then, following Sharyad's gesture, noticed the monitor screen—and realized Sharyad had been watching the entire apartment through surveillance cameras.

Malan asked about the outcome of the negotiations. Sharyad, smiling, replied that he should never ask such a question—because Sharyad never begins anything unless he's

absolutely certain there's zero chance—even a fraction of a percent—that it could fail or go against his will.

Then he asked Malan to bring him some comfortable clothes and a bit of food. Malan did as requested. After Sharyad ate—very slowly—he asked Malan to stand in front of him. Then he told him that, from now on, he intended to make Malan his assistant.

Malan was stunned. Of all the possibilities, he had expected anything but that.

He tried to stay calm and composed.

Before Malan could respond, Sharyad continued, saying this was completely out of character for him.

In all these years, he'd never had an assistant. Employees? Sure—plenty. Many. But never an assistant.

Because an assistant, he explained, is someone you have to be close to. Someone you feel comfortable with. Someone you can even share personal matters with.

Then he clarified that his offer had nothing to do with the drill incident. Rather, he'd seen something in Malan—something he'd never seen in anyone else before.

Malan didn't know what to say. He was certainly opposed to everything this man had done—or at least ninety-nine percent of it.

He'd always harbored a strange hatred toward him, even before they met. But now, standing face to face with the man, he wasn't so sure why he'd hated him in the first place.

Still, he voiced that feeling with remarkable courage.

Sharyad's reaction was somewhat predictable. He turned red, his mouth opened, and after a moment, a sound emerged—he burst into laughter.

But this time, it was more intense. His face turned so red it nearly went purple. For a few seconds, Malan even worried he might choke—but he didn't.

Eventually, the laughter stopped—along with everything connected to it. Then Sharyad became very serious. He stared silently at Malan.

Though only a few seconds passed, Malan felt as if he'd been standing before that gaze for centuries.

Finally, Sharyad told him to remove the table and everything else from the bathroom, and return to his own home.

But before leaving, he asked Malan to bring him a phone.

Malan removed the table and other items from the bathroom, then brought the phone. Just as he was about to hand it over, Sharyad sneezed—a very quiet sneeze.

Malan looked up and locked eyes with him. He handed him the phone.

Sharyad explained that he needed to quickly get things in order so his current condition wouldn't interfere with his work.

And above all, he needed someone to help him manage it all.

Suddenly, Malan said he was willing to accept the offer.

Sharyad didn't seem surprised at all. Calmly, he handed the phone back to Malan and said that, in that case, there was no need to make the call.

Then he told him to sleep in whichever room he liked—because tomorrow morning, there would be a lot of work to do.

Malan was still worried about Sharyad's condition. He said he couldn't sleep under such circumstances.

But Sharyad reassured him that everything was fine. In fact, even before the incident, he often slept standing up at night—and that, in his view, was the best sleeping position.

Malan, surprised, accepted the explanation.

After walking around the apartment for a bit, he chose the second room. He lay down on the bed and experienced the most peaceful and restful sleep of his life.

He had the same dream again.

This time, he was certain everyone gathered around him was looking at him with admiration.

He even recognized some of the faces—former classmates, fellow townspeople, and the girl he'd fallen in love with at sixteen.

He woke in the morning with a strange burst of energy. It felt as if his world had taken on a new color, though he was sure he wasn't just swept up in excitement.

Sharyad had prepared a long list of tasks for Malan to carry out.

First and foremost, Malan was to contact Sharyad's trusted physician.

The doctor arrived quickly and performed initial examinations, but said that removing the drill bit from Sharyad's ear wouldn't be easy.

It could cause irreversible damage.

Sharyad, ever cautious, asked him not to do anything until they were absolutely certain.

To be sure, the doctor brought in a large team of colleagues.

They all agreed that no action should be taken before imaging Sharyad's head. Since Sharyad couldn't be moved to a hospital, the imaging equipment was brought to his home.

One of the bathroom walls—specifically the one opposite Sharyad—was demolished.

Within a few hours, the equipment was brought in, used, and later removed.

After reviewing the scans, MRIs, X-rays, and other data, the doctors concluded that removing the drill bit could either kill Sharyad or, at best, paralyze his entire body—or half of it.

That was not an option Sharyad was willing to consider.

Various demolition methods were proposed by engineers and reviewed by the doctors. Eventually, they concluded

there was only one possible way to free Sharyad from the drill bit—but it came with a high risk.

A fifty-fifty chance: either Sharyad would survive with a piece of wall permanently attached to his ear, or his head would be severed from his body.

Clearly, Sharyad wasn't going to take that risk.

After several weeks, Sharyad informed Malan to pay all the doctors and engineers and dismiss them—he had made his decision.

Malan did just that.

Sharyad told him he considered the entire process a waste of time, and that he should have made this decision from the beginning.

Ever since the incident, he felt healthier, more energetic, and younger. He said he intended to continue his life and work just as he was—and handed Malan a new list of tasks.

Starting the next day, a large number of decorators and workers arrived at the apartment.

In less than a week, they began redesigning the bathroom space—which no longer resembled a bathroom at all—and installing the equipment and tools Sharyad needed to carry out all his essential tasks in his current condition.

The bathroom had been transformed into a massive workspace. Rooms four and five were sacrificed in the process.

The result was a grand, lavish space.

Even a motorized staircase with an attached chair was designed so Malan could position it precisely, allowing Sharyad to sit comfortably.

Sleeping wasn't a problem either.

Even if Sharyad ever wanted to lie down—which he didn't—a bed was embedded in the wall behind him. With the press of a button, it would slide forward to support his back, creating the illusion of lying down.

Everything was prepared with unique and astonishing designs.

By the sixth day, the part of Sharyad's home that had once been rooms four and five had become a strange yet impressive space—perfectly suited to his condition, and fully ready.

It was only from the next day that Malan's real duties began.

At Sharyad's instruction, a press conference was organized.

The most prominent domestic and international journalists attended, prepared to cover a speech explaining Sharyad's condition.

Everyone expected a depiction of a pitiful, helpless man.

But contrary to all expectations, the event became a remarkable and fascinating phenomenon.

By the very next day, people around the world believed Sharyad had chosen this condition himself—to improve his affairs.

As usual, the rumor mill was in full swing.

Some spoke of a groundbreaking medical advancement that could extend human life and youth. Others speculated about a powerful defense technology that granted Sharyad unprecedented security.

And the more superstitious claimed a miracle had occurred.

In short, there was no trace of a miserable man in a pitiful state.

Quite the opposite—Sharyad's image was everywhere: in newspapers, on television screens, across the globe. His fame grew by the day.

Everyone believed Sharyad was now performing his duties far better than before—and was more successful in his work.

This led to his appointment, while retaining his current position, as head of all private and non-private departments in the country.

A role that, in effect, meant he was now running the entire nation.

And the position of deputy? That went to none other than Malan.

Malan was now famous.

Almost no photo of Sharyad was published without Malan appearing in it.

As Sharyad grew more renowned and important by the day, it became necessary to create a larger space for his visitors—who now included leaders from neighboring and even distant countries.

Soon, Sharyad's entire apartment was converted into his office.

Then the entire twelfth floor of the building became his office.

But even that wasn't enough.

The entire building was vacated.

Even the surrounding streets were cleared of people and buildings.

But since Sharyad's apartment was on the twelfth floor, it couldn't expand beyond the footprint of the building.

To allow for further expansion, he needed to be on the ground.

But since that wasn't possible—

Well, the ground was raised, and placed beneath Sharyad.

Now Malan, Sharyad's right-hand man, didn't have a moment to himself.

Influential figures who saw no chance of meeting Sharyad directly tried to get their affairs handled through him.

Soon, news broke that other high-ranking individuals in the country had also benefited from the same defense

technology, medical advancement, or miraculous phenomenon.

They too now had drill bits embedded in their ears, permanently fused to walls.

And it didn't stop there.

Influential figures in neighboring countries began adopting the same condition.

A global competition emerged: everyone was trying to insert longer drill bits into their ears and attach themselves to larger, sturdier walls.

Things escalated to the point where the leader of the world's most powerful and expansive country inserted a half-meter-long drill bit into his ear.

According to rumors and exaggerated reports, it even protruded from the other ear.

The drill bit was bolted to a steel wall.

This bizarre state of affairs brought them immense power and fame.

The competition now revolved around drill bit length and wall material.

It was said that the leader of a rising global power—predicted to become the world's strongest nation within a few years—planned to insert two additional drill bits into his head, alongside the one he already had.

The global "drill phenomenon" continued to spread, and with it, the rumor mill and superstitions thrived.

But none of these extraordinary acts diminished Sharyad's memory—nor did they weaken his power or fame.

After all, Sharyad was the first of his kind—and his drill bit implantation was unlike anyone else's. It had been bestowed upon him by another force, not by his own will. Probably nature. Or even God.

The entire nation hoped Sharyad would run for president. He had become a global hero.

But in a speech broadcast live on 4,852 television networks around the world, he shocked everyone by announcing his intention to nominate Malan for the presidency instead.

Although the final decision rested with the people, it was clear that Malan's rivals were all devoted admirers of Sharyad.

So predicting the next president wasn't difficult.

Now, everywhere people talked about Malan.

His image appeared across the city and country in every imaginable size: very small, small, medium, large, very large, extremely large, and unbelievably gigantic.

With Sharyad's guidance, Malan had already selected his future cabinet.

The election was scheduled for the next day.

On the morning of that day, Malan received a letter.

Due to changes in the city's address system—and especially because the entire area surrounding Sharyad's

residence had been completely transformed (including the former home of Mr. Cholak)—the letter had arrived ten years late.

Malan opened it.

Inside the envelope was a single sheet of paper—a gold-embossed sheet from his former university.

Yes, just one gold-embossed sheet.

He stared at it for a few moments. Then his face turned red, his mouth opened, and after a pause, a sound emerged. He laughed. That was all.

Then he tossed the paper aside and returned to his important tasks.

That night, after ten years, Malan once again dreamed of many people gathered around him, all laughing.

But no matter what he did, he couldn't tell whether their laughter was mocking or admiring.

When he stepped forward, it seemed mocking. When he stepped back, it felt admiring.

He moved forward and backward several times, but still couldn't make sense of it.

He stared at their faces—people he felt he had known before. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't remember their names.

He strained his mind, and suddenly, one face became clearer—almost as if it was moving closer to him.

He instantly remembered the name.

Just as he was about to say it aloud—he woke up.

He tried to speak the name, but it was gone.

No matter what he did, it was no use. The name had vanished from his memory.

FIN